

The Revelation of Godliness

(Matan Torah)

“Love thy neighbour as thyself (Leviticus 19, 18)”
Rabbi Akiva says: “it is a great rule in the Torah”

1) This statement demands explanation. Because the word law (the word law in Hebrew also means whole - C.R.) indicates a sum of details that when put together form the above whole. It turns out that when he says about the mitzvah of “love thy neighbour as thyself” that it is a great rule in the Torah, we must understand that all other 612 mitzvot (precepts) in the Torah with all their interpretations are no more and no less than the sum of the details inserted and contained in that single mitzvah of “love thy neighbour as thyself”. This is quite perplexing, because you can say regarding precepts between a man and man, but how can that single precept support within it all the precepts between man and God, which are the vast majority of the precepts?

2) And if we can still strain to find some way to reconcile their words, there comes before us a second saying, even more conspicuous, about a convert who came before Hillel and asked of him: “teach me the whole of the Torah when I’m standing on one leg”. And he replied: “anything that you hate do not do to your friend (the Aramaic translation of “love thy neighbour as thyself””, and the rest means: go study. Here before us is a clear law (Halacha), that in all 612 precepts and all the writings in the Torah there is none that is preferred to “love thy neighbour as thyself”, because they only aim to interpret and allow us to observe the precept of loving our neighbour unreservedly, since he specifically says - “the rest means: go study”. Meaning that the rest of the Torah is interpretations of that one precept, which cannot be complete if not for them.

3) Before we delve into the heart of it, we must observe that precept carefully, as we are told - “love thy neighbour as thyself.” The word thyself tells us that you must love your friend in the same measure that you love yourself, and in no manner less than that. Meaning you must constantly stand guard to satisfy the needs of each and everyone of the Israeli nation, just as you stand guard to satisfy your own. That is utterly impossible, for not many are the people who can satisfy their own needs during the daily work, so how can you tell them to work to satisfy the wishes of the entire nation? And we couldn’t possibly think that the Torah exaggerates, for it warns us not add or subtract, to demonstrate that these words and laws were given with utter precision.

4) And if this is still not enough for you, let me tell you that the simple explanation of that precept of loving your fellow man is even harsher - that we have to put the needs of our friends before our own, as our sages have written regarding the verse “because he is happy with thee” (Deuteronomy 15, 16), regarding the Hebrew slave: “when sometimes he has but one pillow, if he lies on it himself and does not give it to his slave, he does not observe “because he is happy with thee”, for he lies on a pillow and the slave on the ground. And if he does not lie on it and does not give it to the slave as well, it is Sodomite rule. It turns out that against his will he must give it to his slave, while the master himself lies on the ground.

We also find the same instruction in the sentence about the measure of loving our fellow man, for here too it compares the satisfaction of the needs of his friend to the satisfaction of his own needs, as with the example of “because he is happy with thee” regarding the Hebrew slave. So here too if he has but one chair and his friend hasn’t any, there is a verdict that if he sits on it and does not give it to his friend, he breaks the commandment of “love thy neighbour as thyself”, because he does not satisfy the needs of his friend as he satisfies his own. And if he does not sit on it and also does not give it to his friend, it is as evil as Sodomite rule. Therefore he must let his friend sit on it and he should either stand or sit on the ground. It is understood that this is the law regarding all the needs that are at his disposal and his friend lacks. And now go and see if this precept is in any way feasible.

5) We must first understand why the Torah was given to the Israeli nation and not to all the peoples of the world. Is there, God forbid, nationalism involved here? Of course only an insane person would think that. Indeed our sages have examined this question, which is what they mean by their words: “God gave it to every nation and tongue and they did not receive it.”

But what they find bewildering is why then were we called the chosen people, as it says: “the Lord thy God has chosen thee (Deuteronomy 7, 6)”, since there was no other nation that wanted it? Furthermore, can it be that the Lord came with His Torah in His hands to negotiate with those savage peoples? Such a thing has never been heard of and is completely unacceptable.

6) But when we fully understand the essence of the Torah and mitzvot that were given to us and their desired purpose, as our sages have instructed us, which is the purpose of the great creation that is set before our eyes, then we shall understand everything. For the first postulate is that there is no act without a purpose. And there is no exception here apart from the lowest of the human species or infants. Therefore it is certain that the Creator, whose exaltedness is beyond conception, would not act, be it a great or a small act, without a purpose.

Our sages tell us about that, that the world had not been created but for the purpose of observing Torah and mitzvot, meaning, as we’ve been taught by our sages, that the aim of the Creator from the time He created His creation is to reveal His Godliness to others. Because the revelation of His Godliness reaches the creature as a pleasant bounty that is ever growing until it reaches the desired measure. And by that the lowly rise with true recognition and become a chariot to Him and cleave to Him until they reach their final completion: “neither has the eye seen a God beside thee (Isaiah 64, 3)”. And because of the greatness and glory of that perfection, the Torah and the prophecy also refrained from uttering a single word of exaggeration here, as our sages said: “All the prophets did not make their prophecies, but for the days of the Messiah, but for the next world, neither has the eye seen a God beside thee”.

This perfection is expressed in the words of the Torah and the prophecy and in the words of our sages in the simple word “adhesion”. But from the common use of that word by the masses it has lost almost all its content. But if you linger your mind on that word for just an instant, you will be overwhelmed by its wondrous stature, for if you picture the exaltedness of the Creator and the lowliness of the creature, you can perceive what adhesion of the creatures with the Creator means and why we ascribe that word the purpose of the whole creation.

It turns out that the purpose of the whole creation is that the lowly creatures will be able, through observing Torah and mitzvot, rise ever upward, until they reach adhesion with their Creator.

7) But here come the Kabbalists and ask: why were we not created in this high stature of adhesion to begin with? What reason did He have to give us this burden and labour of creation and the Torah and the mitzvot? And they replied: "He who eats that which is not his is afraid to look at his face", meaning that he who eats and enjoys the labour of his friend is afraid to look at his face, because by that he becomes more and more humiliated until he loses all humaneness. And because that which extends from His perfection cannot be faulty, He gave us room to earn our own exaltedness, through our work in Torah and mitzvot.

These words are most profound and I have already explained them in my book *Panim Me'iroi and Masbirot to the Tree of Life* on the first branch, and in the book *Talmud Eser Sefirot - Inner Reflection Part 1*. Here I will explain them briefly to make them understandable for all.

8) It is much like a rich man, who takes a man from the market and feeds him and gives him gold and silver and all desirables every day. And each day he showers him with more gifts than the day before. Finally the rich man asks: "Do tell me, have your wishes all been fulfilled?" And the man from the market replies, "not yet, for how pleasant and wonderful it would be if all those possessions and precious things came to me through my own work as they came to you, and I would not be receiving the charity of your hand." The rich man told him then: "In this case, there has never been born a person who could satisfy your wishes."

It is a natural thing, because on the one hand he experiences great pleasure and he enjoys them more and more as the rich man showers them upon him, but on the other, it is hard for him to tolerate the shame at the excessive goodness that the rich bestows upon him. That is because there is a natural law that the receiver feels shame and impatience upon receiving free gifts from the giver out of compassion and pity. From here extends a second law, that never will anyone be able to satisfy the needs of his friend to the fullest, because ultimately he cannot give him the nature and the shape of self-possession, that only with it the desired perfection is attained.

But that relates only to the creatures, whereas regarding the Creator, it is completely impossible and unacceptable. And that is the reason He has prepared for us the toil and the trouble of Torah and mitzvot, to produce our exaltedness by ourselves, because then the delight and pleasure that comes to us from Him, meaning everything that is included in the adhesion with Him, would all be our own possessions that have come to us through our own efforts. Then we would feel ourselves as the owners, without which there cannot be a sensation of wholeness.

9) Indeed we need to examine the heart and source of that natural law, and who it is who fathered the flaw of shame and impatience that we feel upon receiving charity from anyone. It is understood from a law, which scientists know, that each branch bears the same nature as its root, and that all the conducts of the root, the branch also desires, seeks and craves. And against them, all the conducts

that are not in the root, its branch distances itself from and cannot tolerate them and is harmed by them. This law is found between each root and branch and cannot be breached.

Now here opens before us a door to understand the source of all the pleasures and pains that abide in this world. Since the Lord is the root of His creations, all that abides in Him and extends to us directly from Him we feel as pleasant and delightful, because our nature is close to our root.

Conducts that do not abide in Him, and do not extend directly from Him, according to the polarity of creation itself, will be against our nature and difficult for us to tolerate. For example, we love to rest and hate to move so much, that we do not make a single move if it is not for the attainment of rest. That is because our root is immobile but at constant rest and no motion exists in Him, God forbid. Therefore it is hated by us and goes against our nature too.

By the same token we love wisdom, strength and wealth, because all those abide in Him who is our root. And therefore we hate their opposites, such as foolishness, weakness and poverty, because they do not abide in Him, which makes us hate and hurt intolerably.

10) That is which gives us the foul taste of shame and impatience when we receive from others by way of charity, because in the Creator there isn't, God forbid, anything such as reception of favours, because from whom can He receive? And because that element does not exist in our root, we feel it as repulsive and loathsome. On the other hand, we feel delight and pleasure with every bestowal we bestow upon others, since that conduct abides in our root, which is benevolent.

11) Now we have found a way to scrutinize the purpose of creation, which is adhesion with Him in its true appearance. This exaltedness and adhesion, which is guaranteed to come to us through our work in Torah and mitzvot, is no more and no less than the equivalence of the branches with their root, from which every gentleness and pleasure and sublimity becomes a natural extension, as we have said above, that pleasure is only in the equivalence of form with the Maker. And when we equalize every conduct that is in our root we sense delight, and everything that is not in our root becomes intolerable, disgusting or considerably painful to us. And we naturally find that our very hope depends on the extent of our equivalence with our root.

12) These were the words of our sages when they asked: "Why should God mind whether one slaughters at the throat or at the neck?" After all, the mitzvot were given to cleanse people, and that cleansing means the cleansing of the turbid body, which is the purpose that emerges from the observation of the mitzvot.

"A wild ass shall be turned into man (Job 11, 12)", because when he comes out of the bosom of creation he is in utter filth and lowness, meaning a multitude of self-love that is imprinted in him, whose every movement revolves solely around himself, without a shred of bestowal upon others.

In that situation he is at the farthest distance from the root, on the other end, since the root is all bestowal without a hint of reception, whereas the newborn is all self-reception without a hint of bestowal. Therefore his situation is regarded as the lowest point of lowness and filth, which is in our human world.

As he grows he receives from his environment portions of “bestowal upon others” depending on the values and development in his environment. And then he is initiated into Torah and mitzvot for the purpose of self-love, for reward in this world and in the next, called not for Her name, because he cannot be accustomed any other way.

As he grows in years, he is told how to observe mitzvot for Her name, which is with a special aim, solely to bring contentment to his Maker, as the RAMBAM said: “women and children should not be told of observing Torah and mitzvot for Her name, because they cannot bear it. Only when they grow and attain knowledge and wisdom they are taught to work for Her name”. And as our sages say: “from not for Her name, one comes to for Her name”, which is defined by the aim to bring contentment to his Maker and not for any self-love.

Through the natural remedy of the study of Torah and mitzvot for Her name that the giver of the Torah knows, as our sages said: “the Creator said: I have created the evil inclination, I have created for it the Torah as a spice”, that creature develops and marches upward in degrees of the above spoken exaltedness, until he loses all remnants of self-love and all the mitzvot in his body rise, and he performs all his actions only to bestow, so that even the necessity that he receives flows in the direction of bestowal, meaning so that he can bestow. And this is what our sages said: “The mitzvot were not given, but so as to cleanse people with”.

13) There are two parts in the Torah: 1) mitzvot between man and God, and 2) mitzvot between man and man, and they both aim at the same thing - to bring the creature to the final purpose of adhesion with Him.

Furthermore, even the practical side of both of them is really one and the same, because when one performs an act for Her name, without any mixture of self-love, meaning without finding any benefit for himself, then a person does not feel any difference whether he is working to love his friend or to love the Creator.

That is because it is a natural law for any being that anything outside one's own body is regarded unreal and empty, and any movement that a person makes to love his fellow man he performs with a returning light and he will get some reward that will finally return to him and serve him for his own good. Thus, such an act cannot be considered “love of a fellow man” because it is judged by its end, and it is like rent that does not finally pay off. However, the act of renting is not considered love of a fellow man.

But making any kind of movement only as a result of love for others, meaning without a shred of returning light and no hope for any kind of self-gratification is completely impossible. About such it is said in the Zohar “every act of grace that they perform is only for themselves.”

That means that all the good deeds that they do, either toward their friends or toward their God, are not because of their love for others, but because of their love for themselves. And that is because it is completely unnatural.

Therefore only those who observe Torah and mitzvot are qualified for that, because by getting oneself accustomed to observe the Torah and the mitzvot in order to bring contentment to one's Maker, one gradually departs from the bosom of the natural creation and acquires a second nature, being the above mentioned love of another.

That is which brought the Kabbalists of the Zohar to exclude the nations of the world from the matter of loving their fellow man, when they said that “every act of grace that they perform is only for themselves”, because they are not involved in observing Torah and mitzvot for Her name, and the issue of their worship of their Gods is for reward and confidence in this world and in the next. Thus, their worship of their Gods is because of self-love, and they will never perform an action that is outside the boundaries of their own bodies, for which they will not be able to lift themselves even a wisp above their basic nature.

14) Thus we can clearly see that toward those who observe Torah and mitzvot for Her name, there is no difference between the two parts of the Torah, even on the practical side, because before one accomplishes it, one is compelled to feel any act of bestowal, either toward man or toward God, as emptiness beyond conception. But through great effort one slowly rises and attains a second nature, and then one attains the final goal, which is adhesion with Him.

Since that is the case, it is reasonable to think that the part of the Torah, which deals with man’s relationship with his friend is better capable of bringing one to the desired goal, because the work in mitzvot between one and the Lord is fixed and specific and one easily gets used to it, and everything that is done through habit is no longer useful, whereas the mitzvot between one and his fellow, are changing and irregular and there are constantly new demands wherever one may turn. Therefore their virtue is much more proficient and certain and their aim is closer.

15) Now we can understand the words of Hillel Hanasi to the proselyte, that the essence of the Torah is: “Love thy neighbour as thyself,” and the remaining six hundred and twelve mitzvot are but an interpretation of it. And even the mitzvot between man and God are also regarded as a qualification of that mitzvah, being the final aim of the Torah and mitzvot, as our sages said: “The Torah and mitzvot were not given, but so as to cleanse Israel with”, which is the cleansing of the body, until one attains a second nature defined by one’s love for others, meaning the one precept of “Love thy neighbour as thyself”, which is the final aim of the Torah, after which one immediately attains adhesion with Him.

But one must not wonder why was it not defined in the words: “And thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy might (Deuteronomy 6, 5)”. It is because indeed, toward man, who is still inside the nature of creation there is no difference between the love of God and the love of his fellow man, because anything that is not him, is unreal to him. And because that proselyte asked of Hillel Hanasi to explain to him the desired outcome of the Torah, so that he shall attain his goal with ease and not have to walk a long way to reach it, as he said - “teach me the whole Torah when I am standing on one leg”. Therefore he defined it for him as love of his friend, because its aim is nearer and is revealed faster since it is mistake-proof and has demand.

16) In the above words we find a way to understand our concept from above (items 3 and 4) about that precept of “Love thy neighbour as thyself,” how the Torah compels us to do something that cannot be done.

Indeed know, that for that reason the Torah was not given to our holy fathers - Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but it took until the exodus from Egypt, and until they became a nation of six hundred thousand people of twenty years of age or more.

For then each member of the nation was asked if he agreed to that exalted work, and once they all agreed to it in heart and soul and said “we will do and we will hear (Exodus 24, 7)”, then it became possible to observe the whole of the Torah, that which before was considered impossible became possible.

Because it is certain that if six hundred thousand people abandon their work for the satisfaction of their own needs and worry about nothing but to stand guard that their friends will never lack a thing, and moreover, that they’ll observe it with a mighty love in their hearts and in their souls, in the full meaning of the precept “Love thy neighbour as thyself”, then it is beyond doubt that no man of the nation will need to worry about his own wellbeing.

Because of that he becomes completely free of securing his own survival and can easily observe the precept of “Love thy neighbour as thyself,” obeying all the conditions given in items 3 and 4. After all, why would he worry about his own survival when six hundred thousand loyal lovers stand by ready with great care to make sure he lacks nothing of his needs?

Therefore, once all the members of the nation agreed, they were immediately given the Torah, because now they were capable of observing it. But before they became a complete nation and certainly during the era of our fathers, who were unique in the land, they were not qualified to truly observe the Torah in its desirable form. That is because with a small number of people it is impossible to even begin the matter of mitzvot between man and his friend to the extent of “Love thy neighbour as thyself” as we’ve explained in items 3 and 4. That is why they were not given the Torah.

17) From all the above we can understand one of the most perplexing phrases of our sages: the phrase that all of Israel is responsible for one another, which seems to be completely unjustified, for is it possible that if someone has sinned or committed a felony that upsets his Maker, and has no acquaintance with him, the Lord will collect his debt from you? It says: “Fathers shall not be put to death for children ... every man shall be put to death for his own sin (Deuteronomy 24, 16)”, so how can you say that even he who is a complete stranger, of whom you know nothing or his whereabouts, you are responsible for his sins?

If that is not enough for you, our sages say: “Rabbi Elazar, the son of Rabbi Shimon says: since the world is judged by its majority and the individual is judged by its majority, if he performed one mitzvah, he has made the whole world righteous, and if he committed one sin, he made the whole world sinners, as it says: “one sinner destroyeth much good”.

Thus Rabbi Elazar, the son of Rabbi Shimon made me responsible for the whole world, since he thinks the entire world is responsible for one another and each person brings merit or sin to the whole world. That is indeed perplexing.

According to the above words, we can understand their words quite simply, because we have shown that each of the six hundred and thirteen mitzvot revolves around that single mitzvah of “Love thy neighbour as thyself”. And we find that such a state can only exist in a nation whose members all agree to it.